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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2907
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2292
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000444

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (GEHRENBECK)

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SUBJECT: ENCROACHING TAJIKS, HIDDEN KYRGYZ ON THE BORDER

REF: BISHKEK 359

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a three-day Embassy visit to Kyrgyzstan's southwestern Batken Oblast, Embassy interlocutors envisioned continued border conflicts with their Tajik neighbors. Kyrgyz officials and observers cited demarcation delays, Tajik encroachment onto Kyrgyz land or into disputed territories (at the alleged encouragement of the Tajik government), cross-border clashes over water usage and deteriorating local economic conditions as contributing factors. All concur that clearly defined borders, agreed upon by both countries, would resolve the issues. In an effort to stem the mass exodus of migrant workers from Batken, President Bakiyev has promised new factories and more jobs. However, the current slow demarcation process seems to favor continued Tajik expansion onto Kyrgyz land. End Summary.

12. (C) During a three-day visit in late April to Kyrgyzstan's southwestern Batken Oblast, which encompasses portions of the heavily populated Fergana Valley, an Embassy-led team explored local concerns, with a specific focus on recent land disputes troubling the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.

BLEAK SITUATION PROMPTS KYRGYZ EXODUS

13. (C) Nazgul Aldasheva of the Batken-based Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) identified three issues influencing the Kyrgyz-Tajik border region: 1) the mass exodus of Kyrgyz citizens from the area who seek work in Bishkek and abroad, 2) the expanding population of Tajiks along the border, and 3) lack of demarcation. Focusing on the first issue, Aldasheva reasoned that sporadic electricity and water supplies; inadequate roads; poor school and medical facilities; and lack of natural gas infrastructure, coupled with a poor job situation in the local agriculture-based economy, caused mass ethnic Kyrgyz migration from Batken.

Aldasheva contrasted this situation with the "flourishing" and more industrial Tajik economy across the border, which she opined supported demand for land among a growing population. Aldasheva believed that until both countries agree upon their borders, Tajiks will continue to settle in disputed areas and push the imaginary borders deeper into Kyrgyz territory.

14. (C) Aldasheva explained that Kyrgyz attempts to curb Tajik encroachment have encountered many roadblocks. She recalled recent attempts to evict Tajik families from border villages that were thwarted by angry mobs of Tajiks or Tajik MVD officers, who came to defend their "citizens' rights to live in that area." While it is illegal for foreigners to purchase property in Kyrgyzstan, Aldasheva noted that Batken authorities recently issued a decree to prevent or reverse the sale of property to Tajiks. According to Aldasheva, the decree empowered representatives of the local administration, MVD, and National Security Service to conduct door-to-door monitoring visits in border towns to search for "illegal Tajik residents." She believed that the decree focused on property transactions in officially demarcated areas. However, Aldasheva claimed that Tajiks subsequently targeted settlement in disputed border areas.

CONFLICTING REPORTS FROM BATKEN OFFICIAL

15. (C) Seyitmurat Kalykov, the First Deputy Head of Batken District, initially told the Embassy that Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens live peacefully along the borders, and that the Batken and (Tajik) Isfara District administrations work jointly to demarcate the border. "The press," he said, led

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by MP Muratbek Juraev, was "exaggerating and blowing the incidents on the border out of proportion." When pressed about problems along the border, Kalykov conceded that, in reality, the Tajiks are buying property illegally and settling on Kyrgyz land. He said that Kyrgyz authorities rarely succeed in evicting Tajiks because they claim that they are "just renting," and that the actual property owners are Kyrgyz. Kalykov then claimed that "this no longer happens in his district but in others, especially Leylak, where the Tajiks are buying up everything!"

STRAIGHT TALK FROM THE BORDER GUARD

16. (C) Kyrgyz Border Guard Colonels Ermatov and Alimbaev blamed the Tajik government for supporting Tajik encroachment into Kyrgyz territory, and cited "unofficial incentives like low-interest loans" for Tajiks to settle in disputed areas. The peaceful veneer of border towns, Ermatov opined, masks aggressive hostility between Tajik and Kyrgyz citizens. He attributed the disputes to the same three factors FTI's Aldasheva identified. Ermatov criticized the Tajik MVD and Border Guard for failing to control their citizens and blamed the mayor of the Tajik Isfara district, Muhiba Yoqubova, for encouraging her citizens to defend their right to the disputed lands. Ermatov hoped for foreign "third party assistance" to allow for productive negotiations in resolving the conflict and completing the demarcation process.

MAYOR BLAMES TAJIK GOVERNMENT FOR STOKING THE FIRES

17. (C) Batken Mayor Saidibragim Seyitkaziev reiterated the view that Tajik authorities aid their citizens' aims to settle in Kyrgyz or disputed territories, but admitted Kyrgyz citizens have little incentive to stay. Although he claimed that relations with the Tajiks were good, he blamed them for inciting the conflicts along the border. Seyitkaziev assured PolOffs that the Tajik government "secretly encourages its citizens to conquer Kyrgyz territory" and that it may be an internal government policy. The mayor blamed Bishkek

authorities for insufficient financial inflows to improve living conditions and keep ethnic Kyrgyz from leaving.

COLLECTIVE PRAISE FOR BAKIYEV

18. (C) Nearly every official praised President Bakiyev for his public pledge to help the citizens of Batken. Each government contact spoke of Bakiyev's plans to build a cement factory in Kyzylkia and an aluminum plant in Khaidarkhan with a sense of optimism that they believed would create jobs and improve the economy. Seyitkaziev claimed that the government is building schools and reconstructing agricultural irrigation canals in the region. Kalykov commended Bakiyev for initiating three exploratory studies by foreign gold prospectors and the opening of a uranium mine in Zardalay. In apparent contradiction with reality, Akilbek Buychiyev, the recently appointed MVD district head, claimed MVD "efforts had halted all illegal property sales" during the past three years, and credited this result to Bakiyev's rise to power.

DEMARCATIION ESSENTIAL TO END CONFLICTS

19. (C) Most of our interlocutors stressed the need for complete border demarcation to eliminate Kyrgyz-Tajik land conflicts. Seyitkaziev estimated that working groups had successfully demarcated only 15% of the disputed territories. Kalykov explained that Tajik and Kyrgyz working groups meet near the disputed area, consult maps and public records, sign agreements, and finally send them to their perspective parliaments for approval. However, demarcation is

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COMMENT

10. (C) To varying degrees, officials admitted that curbing Tajik encroachment required bilateral demarcation efforts in order to prevent small conflicts from erupting out of control. Oddly, no one questioned the apparent limited progress of the Bishkek-based officials leading the border negotiations. While the Tajik government may be delaying the demarcation process, the slow rate of progress enables more Tajik citizens to settle in disputed territories and claim squatters' rights. It is yet unclear whether Kyrgyz officialdom will alter its strategies in Batken to prevent Tajiks from continuing to encroach on the border.
YOVANOVITCH